Video of the Week: For Winter Color, Plant Amaryllis Bulbs

FRUIT

Winterizing Strawberry Plants

Winter can be a difficult time for strawberries in Kansas. Plants need time to become adjusted to cold weather and will gradually become more cold resistant as fall progresses. Strawberry plants are able to withstand colder temperatures in the middle of the winter than in the fall before they have gone through much cold weather. For example, if temperatures suddenly plummet below 20 degrees F before the plants harden to the cold, they can be severely damaged. A drop to 15 degrees F may kill them. Hardened plants can withstand such temperatures with ease. This lack of hardening off may be a concern this year because of the unseasonably warm fall. If a sudden drop in temperature to below 20 degrees F is forecast, it may be wise to mulch the plants as you would for the winter. After the cold snap is over, uncover the plants so they may continue to harden off.

Normally, strawberries should be mulched for the winter around Thanksgiving. However, if temperatures stay abnormally warm, give plants another couple of weeks to become cold hardy before mulching. Mulching plants helps protect strawberries not only from low temperatures but also from heaving damage. Heaving damage occurs when the alternate freezing and thawing common in Kansas winters heave plants out of the ground where they can die.

Wheat straw makes good mulch and is widely available. The straw should be spread over the plants to a depth of 3 inches. Shake the slabs of straw apart so there are no large compressed chunks. This straw mulch not only helps protect the plants over winter but can also help avoid damage from late spring frosts by delaying blooming a few days in the spring. Mulch should be removed gradually in the spring as plants begin new growth. Remove enough so leaves can be seen.

Leaving some mulch in place keeps the berries off the ground and conserves moisture. Also, mulch left in the aisles helps protect pickers from muddy conditions. (Ward Upham)
MISCELLANEOUS

Ashes in the Garden

You may have heard that using wood ashes on your garden can help make the soil more fertile. Though ashes do contain significant amounts of potash, they contain little phosphate and no nitrogen. Most Kansas soils are naturally high in potash and do not need more. Also, wood ashes will raise the pH of our soils, often a drawback in Kansas where soils tend toward high pH anyway. Therefore, wood ashes add little benefit, and may harm, many Kansas soils. In most cases it is best to get rid of them. (Ward Upham)

Houseplants and Indoor Pollution

Researchers at the University of Georgia tested a number of common houseplants for their ability to remove organic volatiles from indoor environments. The indoor pollutants included benzene, toluene, octane, trichloroethylene (TCE), and alphapinene. Houseplants were rated as superior, intermediate, or poor to reflect their ability to remove all volatiles. None of the plants appeared to have been damaged by the volatiles.

Superior Removal Efficiency
Hemigraphis alternata: Red Ivy
Hedera helix: English Ivy
Tradescantia pallida: Wandering Jew
Hoya carnosa: Porcelain Flower

Intermediate Removal Efficiency
Ficus benjamina: Weeping fig
Polyscia fruticosa: Ming aralia
Fittonia argyronera: Silver Nerve Plant
Sansevieria trifasciata: Mother-in-Law's Tongue
Gusmania sp.: Type of Bromeliad
Anthurium andreanum: Flamingo Flower
Schefflera elegantissima: False aralia

Poor Removal Efficiency
Peperomia clusiifolia: Peperomia
Chlorophytum comosum: Spider plant
Howea belmoreana: Sentry palm
Spathiphyllum wallisii: Peace Lily
Schefflera arboricola: Hawaiian Elf Schefflera
Codiaeum variegatum: Croton
Calathea roseopicta: Peacock Plant
Aspidistra elatior: Cast Iron Plant
Maranta leuconeura: Prayer Plant
Dracaena fragrans: Corn Plant
Ficus elastica: India Rubber Plant
Dieffenbachia seguine: Dumbcane
Philodendron scandens: Philodendron
Syngonium podophyllum: Nephytis, Arrowhead Vine
Epipremnum aureum: Pothos
Pelargonium graveolens: Rose Geranium
(Ward Upham)

Monitor Indoor Plant Temperatures

Now would be a good time to check the location of foliage houseplants to be sure the plants don't get too cold this fall or winter. Plants next to windows or in entryways near outside doors are at the greatest risk. Plants sensitive to cold temperatures include Chinese evergreen (Algaonema), flamingo flower (Anthurium), croton (Codiaeum), false aralia (Dizygotheca), and ming and balfour aralia (Polyscias). Monitor and maintain temperatures above 65 degrees F for the false aralia and above 60 degrees for the rest of the list. Many other indoor plants prefer temperatures above 50 degrees. If needed, move plants away from the windows or door entrances to reduce cold temperature exposure. It may be necessary to move some plants from windowsills before shades or drapes are pulled, especially in the evening. (Ward Upham)

Plants and Wind Chill

Sometimes cold temperatures are accompanied by high winds, which may have you wondering about wind chill damage to plants. Though wind chills can have a profound effect on warm-blooded animals' ability to keep warm, plants do not respond to wind chill indexes in the same way. This is because warm-blooded animals must maintain a temperature above that of their surroundings. Higher winds mean greater heat loss. Plants, however, do not need to maintain a temperature above that of the air. Therefore, wind will not increase cold damage to a plant. For example, a wind chill of 0 degrees at a temperature of 20 degrees Fahrenheit will not cause any more cold injury to plant tissue than a wind chill index of 10 degrees above zero at 20 degrees Fahrenheit.

However, wind alone can desiccate (dry out) plant tissues. Plant tissues require moisture to survive, and high wind velocity can cause moisture loss. This desiccation may be great enough to injure or even kill tissue, particularly the smaller size wood as in peach twigs, apple spurs or blackberry canes. (Ward Upham)
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